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Discussion paper for the workshop: Debating Anglo-Polish Perspectives on Sexual Politics

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In recent years, Poland and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in general have gained a noticeable attention in the UK gay community. This has mainly happened because of the xenophobic and hostile attitudes of populist and nationalist parties springing in many former communist countries. Increasingly, we could observe the emergence of a specific discourse about CEE as homophobic.

This particular imaginary was mainly influenced by events in Poland, Latvia, and Russia. More precisely, it was a ban of "gay prides" and, in some cases, violent attacks on the peaceful lesbian and gay protesters that informed this discourse of "homophobic East".

However, in this formation, a troublesome is the geographical idea of CEE, including only tight selection, and excluding various other regions, from the "CEE" umbrella. What is even more important, a particular process of erasing any differences within the region occurs. For example, a fact that Czech and Hungarian republics have introduced certain legal regulations concerning same-sex couples is not discussed at all. Instead, a uniformed discourse of negativity is constructed, where no space for anything positive is left.

During the workshop, I would be interested in discussing the problem of discursive construction of CEE as 'homophobic' by UK gay communities, and ask more probing questions. Why CEE is treaded as uniformly homophobic and any 'positive' differences are wiped out from it? What sort of power relations (between CEE and 'West') is being established in such portrayal of CEE? How can lesbian and gay communities of CEE profit of this discourse? How UK gay communities profit of it?

On the other hand, I am also interested in CEE's and specifically Polish discourses about homosexuality and lesbian and gay communities; originating both in a mainstream society and community itself. Popular lesbian and gay discourses sustain the claim that Polish society is homophobic and intolerant, and that Poland significantly legs behind other Western European countries. This mantra also involves (in most cases) some reference to European Union (EU) as a whip and/or a promise.

The year 2009 closes the 20 years of post-communist

transformation in Poland, hence many initiatives around the globe are being undertaken to summarize this period. The similar trend is also observable within Polish lesbian and gay communities. For example, this year's "Equality Parade" in Warsaw was organised under slogan: "40 years of equality, 20 years of freedom". This referes to Stonewall riots in 1969 and the fall of "Iron Curtain" in 1989. "Stonewall Fund" is also the name of a new fund opened by Lambda Warsaw, one of the leading LGBT organisations.

Pondering around the question of "History"/"history" I wonder what is the significance of those invocations? If we agree that history is a discursive field selectively created for the purpose of maintaining certain power relations and hierarchies (stance many contemporary historians insist on), I would like to discuss - What sort of history Polish lesbian and gay communities create? Why evoking Stonewall? And why not Warszawski Ruch Homoseksualny (Warsaw's Homosexual Movement)? Why not Solidarity Movement? Etc... What is the significance of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' in the creation of contemporary queer politics?

Finally, the last problem I would like to raise for our debate is a discursive creation of "European Union". It is not uncommon between lesbian and gay people (or for that matter, also "liberals" of any sort) to ridicule and dismiss conservative, populist/nationalist imaginary of EU as "EuroSodomy", as unrealistic, untrue, narrow-minded, etc. Less attention, however, is given to the "liberal" vision of "EU" as a construction that occurs at the same moment. Liberal voices not only reject the negative image of EU, but also build up their own imaginary vision. I would like to scrutinise this discursive creation of EU as present within lesbian and gay community. I would like to ask: What constitutes "EU" in these discourses? What is the role of EU in general? And in particular relation to homosexuality? What is the role of EU as the Polish lesbian and gay communities want it to be in relation to Polish state/governments?

By posing those questions I hope to challenge some "liberal" convictions that conservative vision of EU is untrue, and only the liberal one correct. I hope to see how "EU" is constructed on both sides of discursive conflict and ponder about the agenda behind? Examine various strategies of empowerment and disempowerment of each side.

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Overall, my aim is to disrupt monolithic discursive constructions concerning homosexuality, lesbianess and gayness, Central and Eastern Europe, Poland, European Union, nationalism and

liberal/conservative political ideologies. What I hope to contribute/take out of this workshop, is a better understanding of mechanisms behind certain social processes, other points of view that could help me contextualise my own research, and problematize issues mentioned above.

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